Aviation LNO

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An air assault division has certain unique capabilities, and to make the most of those capabilities, close working relationships must be developed and maintained between the infantry brigades and the aviation task forces that habitually support them. This is usually accomplished by the presence of knowledgeable aviation liaison officers at the infantry brigade and battalion levels.

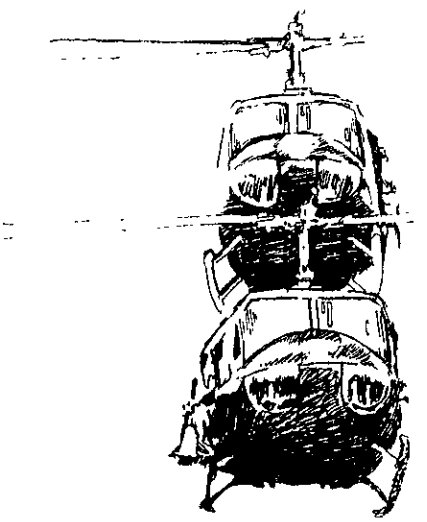
The liaison officer with an infantry battalion is usually a captain from the assault helicopter company that normally supports that battalion. He provides the aviation knowledge the battalion commander and his staff need to plan for and execute a mission. He usually arrives at the battalion headquarters before the actual brigade operations order for a mission is received so that he can be in on the planning from the start.

A typical scenario in an air assault division involves the execution of a raid across the FLOT (forward line of own troops) to destroy an enemy tactical missile site.

When he receives the final mission statement, the aviation LO begins working with the task force's S-3 Air. He usually produces several possible courses of action concerning the enroute air assault plan to comply with the task force commander's intent. With the ability to move and mass quickly, the LO makes sure the aviation units are technically and tactically integrated into the developing plan.

He determines primary and alternate routes of flight to the exact minute. This is of the utmost importance during the execution of any operation, but particularly a cross-FLOT raid. Using terrain masking routes of flight and breaking the serials into basic flights of four, the LO provides for the best use of the UH-60 helicopters' speed and agility. An overall air mission commander (AMC) determines the actual flight formations on the basis of mission, enemy, troops available, terrain, and time (METT-T) and weather.

As the aviation expert at the task force command post, the LO must know and



be familiar with all of the division's organic aircraft; members of the task force will continually ask him for information about his own assault battalion's capabilities and the missions of any cavalry, attack, and medium assault helicopter units under the task force commander's control. To interdict the threat economically, the LO also plans for field artillery instead of attack helicopter support. Of course, attack helicopters furnish security from forward battle positions to provide suppressive fires on areas where the artillery units cannot.

With the help of artillery and other combined arms assets, the task force punches a hole through the FLOT in the initial stages of the operation. This allows the assault helicopters to insert the infantry into landing zones with a minimum of casualties on the way in.

The penetration of the FLOT initiates the sequencing of all combined arms assets across the FLOT during the air assault raid. For example, the LO orchestrates the timing of the suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) with the task force fire support officer and IFF (identification friend or foe) codes with the air defense artillery platoon leader in support of the FLOT penetration.

For a cross-FLOT raid of this type, the LO personally briefs the air battle captain of the supporting air cavalry troop. This briefing includes any significant activities his troop may encounter during the reconnoitering and securing of the FLOT penetration points and established air corridors. Additionally, the LO continuously coordinates with the task force's higher headquarters for updates on the aviation unit's specific intelligence requirements. With effective LO coordination and close coordination between all of the task force's elements, the mission can take place quickly, with great enthusiasm and little radio chatter.

The most important part the LO plays in the task force commander's overall plan is the sequencing of task force elements into combat. The commander gives the LO and the S-3 Air specific guidance concerning the elements that he wants inserted on the initial serials into the landing zones. The number of seats available and the different sling loads for each serial integrate into a flow table that places task force elements into the landing zones at the proper time. In the case

of a missile site raid, the commander instructs the LO to plan for a front-loaded infantry company in the initial air assault serials. Simultaneously, the CH-47s sling load towed 155mm howitzers within range of the raid area to neutralize enemy advances from the flank. In short, the LO analyzes the ground tactical plan and translates it to aviation elements.

Once the LO completes the insertion plan, he begins planning for the extraction. The nature of cross-FLOT air assaults makes it imperative that all members of the task force, down to the last private, know their parts of the extraction plan. The S-3 Air and the LO develop a series of code words and aircraft readiness statuses for use when it comes time to extract the ground force.

When an extraction call comes, or with the passing of a "no later than" extraction time, a coordinated series of artillery and attack helicopter fires is started to cover the retrograde air assault forces. The LO uses the same detailed planning for the extraction planning sequence that he used for the insertion phase. By establishing coordinated extraction fires, and a sequence of readiness levels between the task force commander and the AMC, the LO ensures that the aircraft are on short final approaches as the ground elements move into a pick-up zone posture.

After the planning process, the LO takes an active part in the air mission briefing that follows the issuance of the task force's operations order. With the task force S-3 repeating the concept of the operation and the task force S-3 Air briefing PZ/LZ operations, the LO briefs the task force on the enroute air assault plan, emphasizing downed aircraft procedures, air control points, cross-FLOT considerations, and the mission abort criteria.

Also the LO ensures that the overall air mission commander and a representative from the aviation slice elements (assault support, cavalry, and attack) attend the air mission briefing. The LO tries to give these elements enough time to execute their planning sequences, including a consideration of crew endurance, when planning for the briefing time. If time permits, both the LO and the task force S-3 Air attend the overall AMC's air mission briefing to individual flight crews. This ensures the continuity of information and answers any specific questions about the mission that may have come out of the earlier task force air mission briefing.

After all the briefings are concluded, the LO gives the task force commander any additional assistance he can, including PZ preparation and helping establish an overall PZ command post that can assist the ground commanders who may have questions as they move their units into a PZ configuration. Furthermore, the LO furnishes assistance to the task force staff concerning any situations that arise before, during, or after PZ operations.

The LO establishes communications relay sites at forward laager sites to assist the ground and air elements. The communication sites supply invaluable assistance to all task force elements, particularly during the extraction phase of the operation.

The aviation liaison officer plays a key role within an air assault task force. By careful, well-thought-out route and airflow design, timely coordination with fire support elements, and with the LO having a good grip on the ground tactical commander's plan, air assault missions can move quickly and flawlessly. Above all, the strengthening of habitual working relationships between combat aviation and ground task force elements will result in achieving the full potential of the air assault concept.

Captain William H. Morris recently completed the Aviation Officer Advanced Course and now commands a company in an Aviation task force in the 3d Infantry Division. He previously served as a battalion liaison officer and a brigade Aviation liaison officer in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). He is a 1984 ROTC graduate of Providence College.

The Protractor Compass

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Many years ago, in the July-August 1979 issue of INFANTRY, Lieutenant Colonel William D. Telfair (in the article "Why Johnny Can't Read—A Map!" pages 6-8) proposed a number of "radical" ideas for teaching land navigation to junior officers and NCOs.

He suggested, among other things, that perhaps the lensatic compass was not the best one for military use and that perhaps we should consider replacing it with a Silva-type protractor compass.

At the time, as a lieutenant attending the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, I was struck by the timeliness of the article and agreed with many of Colonel Telfair's comments.

Just two years earlier, I had been introduced to the protractor-type compass while competing for a team that was to participate in a major competition. I was